

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: May 21, 2012

From : 
Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 16: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for project planning and design of Elephant Hill Open Space, El Sereno, City of Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution authorizing a grant of Proposition 84 funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority for project planning and design of Elephant Hill Open Space in the El Sereno area of Los Angeles.

Legislative Authority: Section 33204.27 of the Public Resources Code.

Background: Elephant Hill is a long-embattled 110-acre island of relict habitat in the northeast Los Angeles hills. Proposed for residential development multiple times over the years, the City acquired 20 acres in 2009 as part of a legal settlement with a would-be developer. In 2011, the Conservancy funded the pending MRCA acquisition of five acres of this City holding. The MRCA has since sought funding from other sources for acquisition of additional acreage at Elephant Hill. The First Supervisorial District has expressed interest in appropriating up to \$1 million from Proposition A for acquiring privately-owned properties from willing sellers. As described in the attached application, the requested project planning and design grant would fund planning analysis, project management, and legal staff services for the proposed Proposition A-funded acquisitions.

Community support for preservation of Elephant Hill is strong. A coalition of over 60 community leaders representing diverse organizations was instrumental in blocking the last attempt to develop the site. This group hopes to see the area preserved as open space and opened to the public as soon as possible. This planning grant would facilitate the expansion of the open space preserve to protect a greater portion of the habitat area and its eventual improvement and dedication for public use.

Analysis: The Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84), allocated funds to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy in Chapter 7, 75050(g)(2) of the Public Resources Code for the protection and restoration of rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds and associated land, water, and other natural resources in the upper Los Angeles River watershed.

The Elephant Hills Open Space acquisition and improvements project is within the upper Los Angeles River watershed, and is consistent with Proposition 84's policy to promote access and enjoyment of land and water resources. All of the activities planned under this grant can be considered development, preservation, protection, or restoration for purposes of Proposition 84 because they physically improve the lands being used for the park. The project consists of protection of natural open space through acquisition, restoration to improve the site's natural habitat function, and visitor-serving amenities that educate and communicate the significance and value of natural and cultural resources.

All elements of the project fit within the definitions of eligible activities (development, interpretation, preservation, protection, restoration). Planned improvements include trails, gates, interpretation, drainage, and habitat restoration. The definition of restoration specifically includes planning as an eligible activity.

This project is for the development of a capital asset, that is, a land and water resource in the upper Los Angeles River watershed. As such, it is a proper expenditure of bond funds. The activities that this grant will fund will acquire and construct a new public facility, which qualifies as a capital asset for purposes of the General Obligation Bond Law.